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Inouye vows to kick leakers off Senate Iran-Contra panel

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The chairman of the Senate panel probing the Iran-Contra affair yesterday promised to expose and fire any committee staff member who told a reporter that former CIA Director William Casey masterminded Contra supply efforts.

"We have launched an investigation," said Sen. Daniel Inouye, Hawaii Democrat. "If they are discovered, they'll be fired."

"If the same occurs with a member of the panel, I will not hesitate discussing this matter with the leadership and request that he be replaced with another member," Mr. Inouye said.

The New York Times yesterday quoted two members of the Senate panel and one member of the House investigative committee as saying Mr. Casey was now the focus of the congressional probe.

Mr. Casey, who is being treated for brain cancer at Georgetown Hospital, told the Senate Intelligence Committee last year that he had no role in supplying the Nicaraguan resistance. Congress banned such aid from October 1984 to October 1986.

But the newspaper's sources said they believed Mr. Casey directed Lt. Col. Oliver North to coordinate Contra supply efforts to mask the CIA's role in the operation. The sources said that would explain why Col. North, who was unlikely to have acted on his own, believed he had authority to divert Iranian arms sale proceeds to the Contras.

Col. North was fired from the National Security Council staff in November after his role in the diversion of funds was uncovered.

Mr. Inouye and Sen. Warren

Rudman, New Hampshire Republican and ranking minority member of the panel, would not confirm The New York Times report and would not say whether they knew who on the 11-member committee had leaked the information.

Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, West Virginia Democrat, said a decision on replacing a panel member would depend on the circumstances of the case.

Rep. Lee Hamilton, Indiana Democrat and chairman of the House investigative committee,

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agreed with Mr. Inouye's view about stopping leaks.

"We will check carefully to see if any of our people... were the source of the leak," Mr. Hamilton said after an afternoon meeting with the House panel.

Rep. Henry Hyde, Illinois Republican and a member of the House committee, said members were "severely admonished" at the meeting about leaking information to the press.

The Senate and House committees investigating the Iran-Contra affair will begin joint public hearings May 5.

The pressure for panel secrecy is great because key witnesses are be-

ing granted limited immunity while independent counsel Lawrence Walsh continues his criminal probe of the matter.

With limited immunity, witnesses are compelled to answer questions before Congress, but their testimony cannot be used against them in possible criminal proceedings. Mr. Walsh must build his case on independent evidence, untainted by congressional testimony.

Mr. Walsh earlier this month urged the House and Senate panels to delay granting immunity to Col. North, Rear Adm. John Poindexter, who resigned as the president's national security adviser in the wake of the Iran-Contra disclosure last November, and retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard Secord, reportedly involved in both the Iranian arms sales and Contra supply efforts.

All three men have refused to answer questions before Congress, citing their Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination.

Under a compromise arrangement with Mr. Walsh, the House and Senate panels are expected to grant immunity to Mr. Poindexter so he can be questioned privately by a pared-down panel in early May. He would not testify publicly before mid-June.

Col. North would be granted immunity for private testimony in mid-June, with public testimony later that month.

Neither the House nor Senate panel has decided whether to grant immunity to Gen. Secord. The Senate, however, has voted to cite him for contempt if he fails to disclose details of key Swiss bank accounts under his control.

The contempt case was taken to a

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Rep. Henry Hyde



Rep. Lee Hamilton

federal court yesterday, according to Mr. Inouye. Gen. Secord faces possible imprisonment if he does not provide the records the Senate panel is seeking.

Mr. Inouye said the House and Senate panel's investigation will not be blocked by the ailing Mr. Casey's expected inability to testify.

"I think we will have other witnesses who will fill the gaps," he said. "I am convinced that when the investigations are concluded the people of the United States will have the full story."

In other developments yesterday:

- In an interview with United Press International, Mr. Walsh said he did not know when his investigation would end. He indicated there would be indictments and trials in the case. Mr. Walsh said the current affair is not like Watergate, which involved separate crimes. In this case, he said, the activities "tend to flow together."

- Senate committee leaders denied that the CIA background of a member of their staff would pose

problems for the investigation. "You are assuming that once you work for the CIA you have joined a special conspiracy," Mr. Inouye said about staff member Thomas Polgar Sr., a veteran CIA official. "I don't think that makes him unfit to serve." Mr. Rudman said Mr. Polgar's CIA background would help "inform us as to what really goes on" within the agency.

- The House panel announced it would send an investigator to Costa Rica and other nations in the region next week to interview people involved in private efforts to supply the Contras.

- In a letter released by the White House, the Tower board apologized for having wrongly identified a Treasury Department official as knowing about deposits of Iranian arms sale proceeds in a Swiss bank account. J. Robert McBrien, now with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, was mistakenly named as a National Security Council aide who received information on the deposits from former NSC staffer Lt. Col. Robert Earl.